

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INFORMANT: AHN (HOANG) VU [VIETNAM]
CONDUCTED BY: MICHAEL BELL
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**H = HOANG
B = BELL**

LFP MB-R019

B: What's your, what's your full name?

H: My full names Ahn Vu, Ahn Hoang Vu. Vu's my last name. But ah, they call me Hoang, that's my nickname.

B: Oh!

H: But often people call me Hoang.

B: Hoang. Okay.

H: Yeah. It's easy to remember, you know, just Hoang Kong, you know, something. Sometimes I introduce, my name's Ahn Vu. Easy to, to forgot my name. They, you know. Because Hoang is short name.

B: So your last name is Vu?

H: Yes, Vu, V U [unclear].

B: But in Vietnam it would be Vu Hoang Ahn?

H: Ah, yes. (B: You would say Vu Ahn?) Vu Ahn, yes. [Comment unclear]

B: So how did you get the nickname Hoang?

H: Hoang? Oh! I don't know.

B: Does that mean something?

H: Yeah, yes. Hoang, Hoang is like a king, you know. It's not really exactly (B: Hm) meaning like that. (B: Umhm) But ah, is it like a king, something.

B: Were you, were you born in Saigon?

H: Yeah, I born in Saigon.

B: In what year?

H: Now I live with, with my, my cousin when I was about five year old until I escape my country. My, my parents and the whole families live in Bien Hoa. Bien Hoa is about twenty miles, uh, twenty miles from Saigon. But I, I didn't live with my parents.

B: You didn't. You were born in 1962?

H: Yes, 1962.

B: What month, what month?

H: Uh, November. November, 1962.

B: So you don't remember too much about the Vietnamese War?

H: Mm, no, not really.

B: Yeah. And you came (--)

B: Because, you know, I live in Saigon. And that's jungle, you know. It happened in the other city around Saigon. Maybe is in the middle of my country, you know, because my country divided into three part. Three parts on, North Vietnam, or in the middle, Vietnam, and the other one is in South Vietnam. But it originally happened in the middle. (B: And then you lived?) Because of the boundary in the middle, you know?

B: Umhm, right. So you didn't, you weren't involved in the war directly?

H: No.

B: And then when the Communists came you left in 19, you said 1975?

H: Excuse me?

B: When, when did you leave Vietnam and go to Indonesia?

H: Oh 19, um, 1981.

B: Oh, '81?

H: Yes. And I live in Indonesia for, for three year.

B: Three years?

H: Yes, yes.

B: At that camp?

H: Yes, I come there just about three years, but I try to learn English in Indonesia. I mean in the [unclear] camp.

B: Right.

H: And I come to the USA, I know how to speak English, how to understand the people talk, something. Is not too much, you know, just, just understand and talking. The regular things. I have uh, three months in ah, the college for English, I mean I study English, in New Orleans.

B: What? English as a second language?

H: Yes.

B: E.S.L.?

H: Yes, E.S.L.

B: Were you working in Vietnam?

H: No.

B: You were too young?

H: Yeah, I, I was too young. I went to high school in my country, high school. (B: Umhm) After uh, you know I graduate high school, and then after that I just try to escape my country. So I got no job. I mean, I spend the whole time to looking for, look for the way to escape my country. But you know, that time my parents arrange for me to escape, you know.

B: They arranged for you?

H: Yes. They, uh (--)

B: Are they, are they still there?

H: Yeah, they were still there.

B: Are they? Can they come here?

H: No, no, I don't think so. Because my parents are too old. So uh, they taught if they come here [unclear] is difficult, you know, difficult for the old people, especially about English, you know, second language. (B: Right) And how can they talk? And how can they understand the people? And the other things I thought is there's quite difference in cultural, you know, different cultural.

B: What are, what are some of the biggest differences?

H: Because uh, when uh, the old people live in my country, they are very friendship with the other people. I mean, is in our neighborhood. They, they just want to uh, go to uh, their friend, they just go to their friend and visit there. They don't need to make appointment. They don't need to call, and you know, just come there to visit there. And I know Communism in my country, very hard to live. But the old people, they still feel more comfortable, you know, (B: Right) because uh, they are old, [few words unclear]. They don't care. And, you know, isn't it, is young people who scared, because they uh, the Communism force them to uh, join in the army, something. They have to fight with the other country. And they have no freedom. And do, whatever they do, they have to look around. And scared something, you know.

B: So it's the young people who want to leave more than the old people?

H: Yeah. Some uh, some old people come here and they are boring, and the trouble of their language, the culture. And then they try to uh, go back to country. [Chuckles]

B: Did you go to ah, a temple or a church?

H: Uh, I'm going to a church every Saturday.

B: Oh! Which one?

H: Oh, St. Patrick.

B: Oh, okay. So are you a Catholic?

H: Yes, I'm Catholic.

B: Are a lot of Vietnamese in Lowell Catholic, or some Buddhist?

H: Not not really. Just about seventy, or one hundred people. That's all. Not too much. Not too many.

B: Are, are some Buddhist? Other religions?

H: Yeah, some Buddhist.

B: Do they go to a temple?

H: I don't know, because uh, there's no temple in here, just Cambodian temple.

B: Yeah, and Laos.

H: So maybe it's a difference from Vietnamese Temple, so they don't want you come, you know?

B: How about, uh, customs like, uh, food?

H: Oh, food?

B: [Chuckles]

H: Yeah. You know, the most I say people doesn't get along with American food, you know?

B: They don't?

H: No, they don't. Except the young people, they come here. Seeing they go as a boy who is young, then they grow up in uh, America, America. And so they get along with American food. (B: Right) But the old people come here, they, they couldn't, they can't eat American food. Sometimes just a little bit, you know.

B: What, what kind of, what are the main kinds of food that they want to eat?

H: Oh, just uh, just rice.

B: Rice?

H: Rice, yes. They eat rice every day. And just rice and some, uh, some special food in my country. I mean, it's, uh, it's like noodle, something. They call pho. That, and they call in my country pho, (B: Pho) yeah, p-h-o.

B: Is that, those are noodles?

H: Yes. Noodle. They put, they put some uh, soup in there, some uh, beef, some uh, vegetable, something.

B: Right.

H: That's a famous, famous food in my country.

B: Do you, uh, do you prepare that yourself at home?

H: Yeah (--)

B: Do you cook?

H: Yeah, it's not too hard to cook. They, they cook by uh, beef bone, beef bone, they put in. They put in something else, and (--)

B: What kind, what kind of vegetables?

H: Oh, it's like bean uh, it's you know, soybean, something.

B: Um hm. Soybeans?

H: Yeah, and uh, some, some kind of vegetable, I don't know how to call that. (B: Yeah) But American doesn't eat that.

B: No?

H: No.

B: Do you, where do you buy it?

H: Sometimes American eat that because, they, they eat that all the time. I mean, they, they can come to restaurant, and they order pho all the time. So they know what's that. (B: Umhm) They can eat that.

B: Where do you get your food then?

H: No, in uh, in a Laotian store, in Cambodian store. (B: Oh, okay) We don't have Vietnamese store in here. We have some in Boston, but, it's, it's not quite difference, from uh, Laotian and Vietnamese you know, food.

B: So Laotian food and Vietnamese food are similar? [Other comment unclear-both speak at same time]

H: It's not quite difference, but is it a little bit.

B: You use the same vegetables?

H: Yes, the same. But some, some kind I never eat in uh, in uh Cambodian, or [unclear] food.

B: You don't?

H: No, I don't.

B: Why?

H: Because uh, it's like American and they, they doesn't eat Vietnamese food, you know. Sometimes they can't eat that. It's like me, sometimes I can't eat that. So, I can't.

B: What's, what's the main difference between Vietnamese food and say, Laotian, or Cambodian, or Thai food?

H: I don't know, because uh, each food have a smell different, (B: different) a different smell (--)

B: Yeah, different spices.

H: Yes, different spice. So I don't know how to explain that, (B: yeah) but I just know I can't eat that. I can't eat that, you know?

B: Is it too much fish, or do you eat fish?

H: Yeah, I eat fish. They call ours Sword fish.

B: But at the restaurant where we were (--)

H: Yeah.

B: The Vietnamese restaurant, (H: yes) they have Vietnamese, good Vietnamese food?

H: Yes, Vietnamese food.

B: Are there any other in Lowell?

H: No. (B: Is it just that one?) Just that one. That just open, open about a year ago.

B: That one just opened?

H: Yes.

B: They serve (--)

H: Then they uh serve with Vietnamese food, American food, sometimes (B: Chinese) Chinese food. Sometimes uh, they uh, they try to uh, create, create new food. Mix up with uh, (B: unclear) American, and Chinese, and Vietnamese, and sometimes (--)

B: Is, do you like Chinese food?

H: Yeah, I like it, yeah.

B: What, what kind of American food do you eat, if you eat? [Comment unclear]

H: Just uh, like, beef and steak, sometimes. Sometimes, um, hamburger, Whopper, you know.

B: Fast food?

H: No. My favorite food is uh, the original Popeye and chicken fry.

B: Oh yeah, fried chicken.

H: They call them Popeye.

B: Oh. Is that Vietnamese?

H: No, I mean that's American food.

B: Oh, it's fried chicken?

H: Yeah, fried chicken. But they call, it's not uh, Kentucky, it's not Kentucky.

B: It's another one.

H: They call Popeye.

B: Oh, okay, I don't know that one.

H: It's uh, come from the owners.

B: Oh Popeye's. Okay. Okay.

H: Popeye's, yeah, Popeye.

B: Yeah.

H: Because the first time I just, I just come to uh USA

B: Um hm.

H: Somebody bought for me some, and when I live in [unclear] camp, I don't have enough food to eat.

B: Right?

H: That's right. [Chuckles] You know I, when I see the, oh is, it's good when you know, when you are hungry. (B: Right) So I eat that. Oh, [unclear] and I eat all the time when I [unclear].

B: You eat hamburgers?

H: Yeah, sometimes.

B: Pizza?

H: You know, I don't like it, but I still eat that, because it's uncomfortable for, um, when I go to school, I have just about an hour, half hour, to uh, to get out for lunch.

B: Right.

H: So it's easy just come there, to order one and just a few minutes to eat that, and then go back to school.

B: But when you cook at home, you cook Vietnamese food?

H: Yes. I cook Vietnamese food. Sometimes Chinese food. It's not difference from Chinese and Vietnamese food.

B: It's similar. Much the same?

H: Yeah, much the same.

B: And you say you live with your brother, and just one?

H: Yes, my brother and my sister.

B: Oh, your sister?

H: Yes.

B: Are you the oldest?

H: Uh, no. Uh, my brother's the old, my older brother.

B: Oh. How old is he?

H: He's uh, was born 1960.

B: Oh, so he's twenty-seven?

H: Yeah, he's uh two years older than I'm.

B: Two years older?

H: Yes.

B: And how old is your sister?

H: Oh, about twelve years old.

B: About twelve years old?

H: Yes.

B: She's going to school?

H: Yes. She went to uh, St. Patrick School.

B: Oh.

H: Private school. It's very good, because uh, some sister in there, because uh, that's a private school and Catholic school. (B: Right. right) And they try to take care of my sister, you know? You know, first, I mean uh, my sister come America, America for two years. Two years later, I mean, two years later.

B: Two years after you?

H: No. She come the same time.

B: Oh.

H: But she went to, I send him, I send her to uh, Chicago.

B: Oh.

H: My cousin live there.

B: Oh, your (--)

H: Then she went to a Chicago school. And after that, two years later, I took her from Chicago to uh, to Lowell. She uh, she doesn't know how to speak English. She, she doesn't know how. I mean it's very stupid, because she live in America for two years. I don't know why.

B: And she didn't learn English?

H: Yeah, she did. She went to school, but after I send her to St. Patrick School, (B: Right) and after one year she speak English very good. It's like American voice, and you know, accents like American.

B: Yeah.

H: Maybe the sister take care too much in the school.

B: She's younger, too. It's easier when you're young, when you're younger. (H: yes, younger)
She was what, nine years old when she came here? [Few words unclear]

H: Yes, nine year old.

B: Do you think she's becoming more Americanized?

H: Yeah, she's, she love American food. Do something like American culture, you know.

B: And your brother, is he working?

H: Yes, he's working.

B: What does he do?

H: Uh, he's uh, do something about computer, something in Wang.

B: Oh Wang?

H: Yes.

B: Electronics?

H: Yeah, electronic.

B: Did,, did, did you live in New Orleans with him? New Orleans?

H: Oh yes. I live in New Orleans with him. And I come here before he, he did. I come here for a year later.

B: Um hm.

H: I, I call him and he came here. He came here just about two years. 1986, sometime.

B: Well, what are some of the other customs that you are changing from Vietnam, Vietnam to America? Uh, let's see, language is one.

H: Yeah.

B: You learned English.

H: Yeah, maybe the life of, uh, younger people change too much.

B: Too much.

H: Yes, too much. Because, uh, in my country if the younger people is I mean, uh, under eighteen, (B: Umhm) when they go somewhere they have to ask their parents. They do, whatever they do, they have to ask parents and need uh, need ideas from parents. When they come here, there's some people they uh, they don't care, the parents, you know. Did you want to go, go somewhere, you know.

B: Um hm.

H: They don't care, they just, why don't you go!

B: So, that (--)

H: So it's, it's quite different.

B: The discipline and the family.

H: Yeah.

B: Or parents' control.

H: The parents can't control them.

B: Not as much control.

H: Yeah.

B: That's more like an American family.

H: Yeah, system. Yeah, I know.

B: What about (--)

H: Yeah. Even uh, the older, older people, I mean, over in eighteen years, when they go somewhere, they have a date, or something, they still have to ask the parents.

B: Oh.

H: They, they, until they get married, they still belong to the parents. I mean the parents still control them. Sometimes they need to do something, ask parents. That's in my country, you know.

B: Yes. Do parents pick who you will marry?

H: Not really. That's a very old custom.

[Both are speaking at same time. Interviewer's comment unclear]

B: Very old.

H: But, it happens sometimes. But it's not a lot of people do that now.

B: But young people here are dating in American, like Americans. That they want to go out with someone, they just go.

H: Yeah.

B: Just for a date.

H: Yes.

B: Go to a dance. Go to a party, or movie.

H: Yeah. But some uh, some people live, I mean uh, the most it happen with the male people, you know.

B: Uh huh. More, more of the boys than the girls.

H: I mean more the girls than the boys, female.

B: Oh. They're changing more, the girls?

H: Yeah, because uh, if they live here with their parents, they belong to parents, it's better. But they come here by themselves, they just control themselves.

B: Um hm.

H: So they, they just do whatever they want. Some, some people, they just want to dance and go to the party. No school, you know.

B: Oh.

H: Because uh, they have no parents here.

B: Because they have no parents.

H: Yeah.

B: Will that be a problem with your sister? Or will she do what you, you and your brother say?

H: No, because my sister, I take care of her like my parents, you know.

B: Right. And she respects you as (--)

H: Yes.

B: What you say?

H: Yes. Because uh, I really don't want my sister go out much, you know. Because uh, sometimes they uh, they get along with American culture. I can't control her, you know. Sometime they, they say why don't you go, they go. She want to go, she doesn't want to ask me if uh, she go out too much.

B: But she's only twelve.

H: Yeah, only twelve.

B: Twelve years old, so another couple of years, she may start dating.

H: Yeah, I know.

B: Things will change.

H: But I just try to keep her in my control. Control, yeah. (B: Right, under control) But I, I just try to do it. But, [chuckles] I'm not guaranteed to do it.

B: Um hm. Well do you speak French?

H: No. My parents speak French. The most, uh, older people in my country speak French.

B: Speak French, yeah.

H: You know, because French came to my country before.

B: Right, right. Before the Americans?

H: Yeah, before Americans. And then after American came to my country, the, the all of the people change to uh, change to uh study English.

B: English.

H: Yeah. I study English in my uh, high school in Vietnam.

B: Even after the Communists?

H: Yeah.

B: They teach English too?

H: Yes.

B: Hm.

H: They teach English and, uh, uh, Chinese and, you know, Soviet.

B: Russian?

H: I don't know what, what it call that, Soviet?

B: Soviet?

H: Yes.

B: That's Russian? The language?

H: Yes.

B: That the Soviets speak?

H: Yeah.

B: It's Russian.

H: Russian?

B: Russian.

H: They call that?

B: Yeah.

H: Oh.

B: (Speaks few words in Russian)

H: [Laughs]

B: [Laughs] I learned that in high school.

H: Oh.

B: I took Russian.

H: [Laughs]

B: Do you still,uh, do you speak Vietnamese mostly with, with other Vietnamese in Lowell?

H: Yes. That's my trouble. That's my trouble. I mean it's good for me when I keep my language, my modern language.

B: Right.

H: But, it's, it's no good when I talk English. I still have Vietnamese accent. Sometimes the people does, doesn't understand (B: Right) what I want to say, you know. I live with American friend for a few months in [Bedford?], near my school. That's how I speak English better.

B: Oh, yeah.

H: Then but I, I don't get along with the American, uh, culture. So I left for him.

B: Um hm.

H: And moved out.

B: You don't get along with American culture?

H: No.

B: What, what do you mean?

H: No, I mean. I don't know. When I live with him, I see, uh, he went to work in the morning until uh, until uh, the night time.

B: Right.

H: Just like that. Every day he go out and go back, and go out and go back.

B: Um hm.

H: Nothing happened in my life. And I go to school and go back, and uh, study and then go to sleep, and go to school.

B: Right.

H: It's, it's like a cycle.

B: Right.

H: I can't, I can't cook at home because I live with him. I scared. I'm (--) I don't know that, but I scared he, he doesn't want to smell some Vietnamese food, you know.

B: Uh huh.

H: But I just try to avoid that.

B: Um. Did he cook?

H: No. Sometime he went to restaurant. Hamburger, whopper, something.

B: Right.

H: That's why I have to, went to, I had to go to American food too. I mean hamburger, whopper every day.

B: Right.

H: It's boring. So

B: Yes.

H: I can't eat that anymore. [laughs]

B: That's true.

H: Yeah.

B: So when you came back here, you're, you don't speak English as often?

H: No.

B: You don't speak.

H: I say it in my school.

B: Do you have many friends who speak Vietnamese here?

H: Yes.

B: When you speak English, you thinking Vietnamese, in Vietnamese?

H: Nah, yeah I did, I did when, um, when a few, a few months I just come here, you know? I mean uh, a few years ago when I speak English I have to translate into my language in my mind.

B: Right.

H: So far, sometime I just talk talk talk, because I talk often, you know.

B: Um hm.

H: So I, I don't have to, uh, transfer into my language.

B: What are some of the other big differences in traditional Vietnamese ways, and in here in America. Is this the same, health or medical? Is that different?

H: Yeah it's different. Though some uh, my um, my people when they get sick, they just stay home. Just uh, they got a cold, and something, they stay home and do something. They do the [unclear], or the coin to scrub the body.

B: No. Oh the coin?

H: Yeah.

B: Oh, yeah. Coin

H: They, and they, yeah. They scrub on the body like this, yeah.

B: They rub the part of their body with a coin?

H: Yes.

B: The part that hurts?

H: No.

B: Just (--)

H: Just, eh (--)

B: Like [unclear]?

H: Very light, yeah. That's in my culture.

B: Um hm. That's all?

H: And they, they usually use medicine at home, you know. Just, oh I got sick, I need some medicine.

B: What kind of medicine, do you know?

H: Uh, I don't know. But uh, they usually use American medicine, American medicine.

B: You mean from the drug store?

H: Yeah, from drug store.

B: Not Chinese medicine?

H: Um, some people use Chinese medicine.

B: Um hm.

H: Not too, too many.

B: There's a Vietnamese doctor in Lowell, medical doctor.

H: Yes. We have four, four uh, yeah, four American, uh, for Vietnamese doctors.

B: Four Vietnamese?

H: Yes.

B: Is that where most Vietnamese go for (--)

H: Yes.

B: To the doctor?

H: Yes, yes. That's a, that's an important things in Lowell, you know. Some people, they don't speak English.

B: Right.

H: They can't go to American doctor.

B: That's fine.

H: Then they got to, uh, Vietnamese doctor. It's easy to explain something happen, you know.

B: Who, who are the Vietnamese doctors? I just knew one. It was right over by the [unclear].

H: Oh, that's the uh (--)

B: That's (--)

H: That's [Dor Lo Chun Ho?] Eh, he's my friend. And the other his name [Kong?]. I know about two. Yeah, I just know two doctors. Oh, three, [Kong?] and [name unclear]. I think, I don't think you know them.

B: No.

H: But uh, most Cambodians and Russians went to, going to, uh, Vietnamese doctor, because they don't have doctors.

B: Yeah, there's no Cambodian doctors.

H: No. But they have uh, they have uh, translator, I mean the people tran, tran, uh, translate to uh, Cambodian language, something.

B: Oh, at the office, at the doctors they have translators?

H: Yes.

B: Is there a Vietnamese organization in Lowell, like uh, there's the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association and the Laotian American Organization. Is there a Vietnamese Assistance Association or something like that? A club, or agency?

H: Mm, no.

B: No?

H: No. Just uh, I don't know about that. There's no assistance system in here.

B: Hm.

H: Because, just the Vietnamese, they have a doctor, they hire, they hire, Vietnamese who know how to speak Cambodian, how to speak Laotian, and work with him and translate. They have an, they, some, sometimes they just went to uh, the doctor. They have, they don't have to make an appointment. They just come and uh, take, you know, something.

B: Um hm.

H: So it's more comfortable for Laotian people, because Laotian people, they don't need to make an appointment when they come to see, to get in.

B: That's the way it is then.

H: Yeah, that's the way it was in (--)

B: At, in Vietnam?

H: Yes.

B: You just go when you (--)

H: Yes.

B: And you sit and wait your turn? You wait for your turn?

H: Yes, just wait for, for their turns.

B: So they don't make appointments.

H: No. [laughs]

B: Is that a big difference in (--)

H: Yeah, that's a big difference.

B: In everything, not just with doctors, but do Americans think that they (--)

H: There's no (--)

B: Make more appointments and run by the clock more? Time is?

H: Not in my country. The most people they own their, their house. Because the house, they don't need air conditioner, they don't need heater, because the weather is warm all the time. (B: Umhm) So everybody own their, own their house. And they don't have to pay for the house. They don't have to pay for, um, for utilities, you know.

B: Utilities, right.

H: Yeah. So, so sometimes they, they thought, oh the life in my country is easier in American, because they don't have bill, telephone bill, no telephone bill. (B: Right) No (--)

B: Electricity.

H: Yeah, they don't, don't have electricity bill, but no wire bill. No uh, (B: unclear) no [unclear], you know.

B: How about taxes?

H: No tax.

B: Huh.

H: No. Except some uh, business, you know, business, they have to pay tax.

LFP-MB-R020

B: What are some, some of the other big differences that, between Vietnam and, and America? I mean, we talked about language and uh, houses and utilities, health, food. So. Parents and control.

H: [Chuckles] Um, the most Vietnamese in my country, they, they don't use check. They use cash (B: Oh, no credit) all the time, yeah. Because uh (--)

B: No credit?

H: No credit.

B: Credit cards, (H: no) checks?

H: Just, you want to buy something? Okay, they pay cash.

H: No banks?

H: They, they, they have a bank, but they just put the money in there for saving. I mean for the people who's rich, you know?

B: Yeah.

H: They have much money. They want to ah, make a business, or something. They put money in there. And the most people they keep money at home.

B: Hm, that's not good though.

H: Yeah, I know.

B: So, fire?

H: Fire, yeah.

B: Somebody will rob. Thieves rob.

H: So, so it happened in my country sometimes. Stove and fire burn all the money, you know, something. But some, uh, some people they use money to buy gold. Gold, and they put, they put at home. Sometimes the fire, or something, they still keep that and take it out, you know.

B: When you left, when you left Vietnam was it hard to take anything with you?

H: No.

B: Could you take (--)

H: Just a short and a tee-shirt, that's all.

B: That's all.

H: Because my [unclear] I mean my boat about ah, four or five feet, four or five feet, feet wide. And is about twenty one maybe twenty five feet long. There, there were fifty-two peoples on that, on that boat, yeah. The level, the level of water is just like this. Just about two inch, or sometimes one inch.

B: Wow, if you were in a storm (--)

H: Yeah, you know (--)

B: You would be (--)

H: Just about five persons fall and live.

B: Fall in?

H: I mean ah, five persons ah, alive.

B: Oh, five persons left?

H: I mean it's about ninety, ninety-five persons die, you know? So they have no hoping. They escape, oh, they have no freedom. They have nothing in my country. So they try to escape. The most of the young, younger people escape from my country.

B: From the South anyway.

H: Yes. Some, some people in the North. They still come to ah, South and then escape from South to the other country.

B: So you went on a boat from, from Saigon?

H: Yes, from Saigon.

B: To Indonesia?

H: Yes. I was, I was in an ocean. In an ocean. I was on ocean for three days. (B: Hm, three days) Three days and four night. And the big ship come to ah, took me up.

B: Took you to the camp?

H: Took me to yeah, took me to the camp.

B: And you were there three years.

H: Yeah. If ah, if my boat couldn't come directly to the camp, you know. Because some people on my boat they just drive, they have no direction. They just want to try, they just want to escape, you know.

B: Yeah.

H: So maybe they, they half expect when they get out of my country, they meet some ship, big ship. The ship will save them, you know. So they just try.

B: Your brother and sister went with you? (H: Yes) The three of you?

H: Yes. I have got two brothers. But ah, my parents doesn't, didn't want we go together. (B: No?) Because sometime it happen, all die, you know. And sometime I was catch, I were caught, I would be in a jail.

B: Right.

H: My brothers stay home, you know. Divide into two part.

B: So you have two brothers?

H: Yeah, two brothers.

B: Still in Vietnam?

H: In Vietnam, yes.

B: With your parents?

H: Yes. Two brothers and a sister.

B: Oh!

H: And (--)

B: So half the family, half the children are here?

H: Yes.

B: One half?

H: Yes, (B: and one half) and I have another brother went to Singapore. (B: Oh) And then they uh, they came to, what's that? I don't know. They went to the other country. But I don't know, how can I call that?

B: He went to another country, your brother?

H: Yes.

B: From Singapore?

H: And ah (--)

B: You don't know where he is?

H: No.

B: Australia?

H: No, Australia. I have a cousin live in Australia.

B: You think your other two brothers and sister in Vietnam will leave?

H: Yes. (B: They will? They will come?) [They were in prison?]. They got in a lot of trouble. They went to the jail sometimes. A few times before.

B: Is anyone else in your family a painter, an artist?

H: Oh, yes. I have got two brothers they painter. And my parent, my father painter, my father is a painter.

B: Oh, what does, what kind of painting?

H: You know, oil paint and drawings, something. But ah, about, do something about commercial art. You know

B: Commercial Art.

H: Advertise something (B: advertising [unclear]) on the newspaper, you know.

B: Is that how he made a living?

H: Not really. Sometimes he just enjoy it. Enjoy, he do it. And he have a, a nail company.

B: A nail company?

H: Yes.

B: They make nails?

H: Yes.

B: That you hammer?

H: Yes, nail company.

B: That's what he does?

H: Yes.

B: Wire nails?

H: Ah (--)

B: Did you work for him? In Vietnam? Then you were too young?

H: No. Ah, because ah, after I uh, I finished my high school, (B: umhm) I spent whole time for, for escaping, you know. I try to find a way to escape. So I have no time to help my parents.

B: Did your father teach you about drawing?

H: No.

B: Painting, no?

H: No.

B: Do you wish (--)

H: I just do it by myself. (B: you did?) But I don't know, I don't know how can I do it, you know? I just think, oh, I do it. That's all. I don't know why I do it. I mean when, when I do it, when I do it, I really don't know how I do it. Because ah, because I, I saw my parent, my father paint sometimes. But I, I don't mean I copy my father to paint. But because it comes from my mind.

B: You just did it on your own?

H: Yes.

B: Well, I mean I ran in ah, Jim and Joan spoke?

H: Yes.

B: Spoke about you would use the candle, the black for (--)

H: Yes, that's, that's my idea when I live in Refuge Camp. (B: Right) Because I have no money to buy something you know. Even brush and material.

B: So what did you use?

H: Yes, so I use that by my, I mean I uses the candle to do, to make uh, a charcoal and draw something.

B: Did you keep any of those?

H: Yes, I keep one at home. It's ah, it's like a charcoal drawing in American.

B: Yeah.

H: But American they, they use the fingers to draw it.

B: Right.

H: But, I use a brush. I use the hair to, to make a brush.

B: Oh, okay. So you made a brush with hair. With your own hair.

H: Yes. Yes, and I draw it. I have one at home. [laughs]

B: What, what are the major subjects that you like to paint?

H: Ah, I don't know, but I like to paint something happen in my country. But I still want to paint with American way, but ah, just telling the story you know, I just want to telling the story, and the meaning with the painting.

B: When you say painting American way. What, what do you mean?

H: You mean, because American way different from Vietnamese way. When I, when I draw, I mean when I draw in my country I use brush and something. And, just like that. But I come to here, they never, they never use brush with charcoal.

B: No.

H: No. So, they just use the fingers and something like that.

B: How about pencil?

H: Pencil, not here. They'd use pencil sometime. But is there, I mean a few people use that in my country.

B: Hmhm, but you didn't too much?

H: No I didn't.

B: You didn't draw out the sketch?

H: No.

B: Draw with a pencil or pen?

H: No.

B: Mainly paint.

H: Right.

B: Ah, what? Acrylics?

H: No. There, there, there was no acrylic at home and in my country. Just oil.

B: What did you use? Oil?

H: Yes.

B: And water color?

H: Watercolor, yes.

B: You use water?

H: Yes.

B: Do you paint with watercolors?

H: Nnnn, no. I hate that. [laugh]

B: It's hard. It's different. [laugh]

H: Yeah. I paint it sometimes. But the people when they look at my painting with the watercolor, they say oh, I like it, I like it. But, [laugh] I really don't like it when I do it with watercolor.

B: Why not?

H: Because I don't like it. [laugh]

B: Do you like acrylics?

H: Yeah.

B: What's that, your favorite?

H: My favorite is the oil, yeah.

B: Oil.

H: And pastel.

B: Pastel?

H: Yes. But, I mean the oil, pastel, it doesn't matter what you paint or drawing. But they paint on the [unclear]. They paint under painting you know. It appear beautiful and something.

B: They're similar with all the different colors.

H: Yeah. If ah, if you paint a painting, I mean a technique like some artist [unclear], it means you have to ah, create, create a new way to do, you know. Maybe it's better.

B: So how, how is your art changing now that you're going to school?

H: [Unclear]. I mean ah, when I paint in my country, I just think about I paint, or sometime I don't scare, I don't care about ah, composition something, colors working, you know. Well so far I know everything.

B: So now you're learning composition, colors?

H: Composition, colors and sometime the way to do, you know.

B: Are colors different in Vietnam than American painting?

H: No. It's the, it's the same, but because I never went to school before, I never go to school before, so I don't know how to ah, mix up the colors. I don't know how to use colors. But I know how to paint.

B: Yeah.

H: So look in my paintings and sometime it happen with the colors. Dirty colors. It's messy, you know.

B: Because you couldn't get, you didn't know how to get the ones you wanted.

H: Yeah, because I have no color theory.

B: Right. So you have more control now.

H: Yeah, more control now. But, you know, you have, I mean if you want to be a famous painter you know, you have to create your own, your own way, you know. Never copy from some artist. They're looking, they'll copy from artist. They'll do it for, it's not a practice, you know? Then later on you can try, you try to create, create a new way.

B: Yeah. First you have to learn.

H: Yes. I have to learn.

B: The techniques [unclear].

H: And then sometimes we, we take all the technique in together and create a new technique.

B: But you, you already have your own (--)

H: Ahhh

B: Style?

H: Yeah. I mean when I go to school I do whatever the teacher says, you know. And the technique, and then I go home, I change my technique to do different from the school.

B: Right. Which, which school are you going to?

H: Ah, Monserrate School.

B: Monserrate

H: Monserrate College of Art.

B: That's, you have to drive there and back every day?

H: Yes. Everyday. Oh terrible.

B: How long does it take?

H: Um, excuse me?

B: How long?

H: Oh! It's about forty-five minutes. It's really one, one hour. An hour. Because of the, they got a traffic jam.

B: Traffic jam.

H: Yeah.

B: How many years have you gone there? What year are you?

H: Oh, right now a Sophomore.

B: Sophomore? You will go four years?

H: Yes, four years. Two more years. I don't know. [laugh]
Maybe four, maybe five years. Because ah, I have to take Psychology, Biology, Art History, English.

B: English composition.

H: These all very hard courses for me. So maybe ah, the third year, or fourth years I'm taking those course. Right now I don't know when ah, I take Art History before, but ah, is, I got a lot of trouble, you know.

B: In Art History?

H: Yes. Very hard for me.

B: Why? Because of the English?

H: Yes, [B: unclear] because of the English.

B: I guess the lectures are hard. [pause] In the lecture? When the professor is lecturing in the class?

H: Yeah.

B: You have to take notes?

H: Yeah.

B: That's hard to understand sometimes?

H: Yeah, I am taking notes, but it's not all. Just a few words.

B: Yeah, it's hard.

H: But I still am missing a lot.

B: Right.

H: After, I know I got a terrible of English. So after, after class, sometime I came to, I came to the teacher.

B: Um hm.

H: And ask, ask them what I need to know more, you know. And what I don't understand.

B: They'll help you?

H: Yeah, they help me to try to, because in my school just one Vietnamese there.

B: You're the only one?

H: Yes. I'm only one. And last year I have a friend, Chinese. I don't know friend Japanese. I got three friend Japanese in ah, in my school. And this year some, one move back to ah, their country. One moved to New York. And the other one moved to Canada. So I stay here alone. [laugh]

B: Right. But do you have friends, you have friends here? In Lowell you have friends.

H: Yes. I've got a lot of friends in Lowell.

B: Mostly Vietnamese?

H: Yes. Most Vietnamese.

B: Do you have a girl friend? [laugh]

H: Mmmmmm yeah! [laugh] But I, I don't, I got, I have a good friend, but I don't think I'm, I'm getting married.

B: [Unclear]

H: Because right now I have nothing. How can I get married? You know.

B: Wait till you get out of school?

H: Yeah, maybe in ten year. Something like that. [laugh] Ten years, when I'm thirty-five.

B: When you're famous. [laugh]

H: Yeah. [laugh]

B: Did, what the Vietnamese people in Lowell live, live in the same area, same neighborhood?

H: No.

B: Are they scattered?

H: No. They live in (--) I don't know, but I don't know a lot of the Vietnamese here. Some people they just come here for a few months you know. So they live around.

B: And then they leave and go somewhere else?

H: Yeah, somewhere else.

B: So, the Vietnamese who live here [unclear] scattered in the, in the city or?

H: No. They live difference place in Lowell, just in Lowell.

B: Where?

H: Some they, they live in ah, in South Lowell. (B: South Lowell?) Some they live in, in near Tyngsboro, near New Hampshire, near Dracut. They, they don't live in the same area.

B: So there's no one, no neighborhood.

H: No.

B: Really, no Vietnamese neighborhood.

H: No. Sometimes they ah, celebrate ah, celebrate some days you know. Celebration they have a chance to meet together. (B: They get together) And to talk and something.

B: What are some of the celebrations?

H: Excuse me, celebration in my country?

B: What, what is still going on here?

H: They ah (--)

B: Do you celebrate the New Year on April 13th?

H: Yes they, yeah, the New, my New Years difference ah, from American New Year. I mean it's around February something.

B: February?

H: Yes, it's around there.

B: What, what of celebration do you do?

H: Just the New Year, and (--)

B: What happens on New Year?

H: Oh!

B: What do you do?

H: Ah, ah they, and they come to the city together you know. They are, they're just wishing, and sometimes they singing.

B: Wishing?

H: Yeah, wishing. I mean ah, greeting, you know.

B: Greeting?

H: Yeah. And sometime they ah, they do some ah, something. I don't know how I can call that. But ah, they give a present, present to, to the people who dead, and something, you know?

B: Oh, gifts. Offerings to the dead?

H: Yeah.

B: What, ancestors?

H: Yeah.

B: What kind of offerings? Food or (--)

H: Just some ah, some vegetable and some fruit.

B: Um hm.

H: And they just put that into ah, how can I, they call? Is it they burn in the top and it [burns?] like this.

B: They burn what?

H: I don't know what they call that. But you know, a stick.

B: A candle?

H: No. No candle. They, that belong to Chinese.

B: [Unclear]

H: Yeah. Anyway they burn, burn it and the smoke coming out.

B: Incense.

H: Yeah, maybe.

B: Smells good?

H: Yeah!

B: Incense?

H: Yeah.

B: It's called incense.

H: Yeah.

B: Like a stick that you put it on fire and the smoke, and it smells like perfume?

H: Yeah.

B: Sandlewood, different smells? Incense.

H: And they have, they have a special, special food for, for New Year. I mean there's a [unclear] and ah, the bean inside ah, with the pork, something. I mean some pork and something in ah, inside. And I don't know how to make it. But that's a very special.

B: Oh, it's like a roll? An egg roll, or a spring roll?

H: No, no. It's a big like this. It's big like this.

B: Oh!

H: Ah, this is very special. Just for New Year.

B: What's it called in Vietnamese?

H: They call [Bang Chen?].

B: [Bang Chen?]?

H: Yes.

B: [Bang Chen].

H: Yes, they call [Bang Chen].

B: And it's like beans and (--)

H: Ah, this cake, this cake is ah (--)

B: Oh, it's a cake.

H: Yeah, they call it a cake.

B: Oh.

H: But they make out of rice and some meat, something. But this ah, this cake they have a story from a thousand years ago something, you know.

B: What's the, do you know what is the story?

H: The story is, when the king they did want to eat something, they says, who make very good food? And the king like it. He gave some prize, you know, something. Then, just one person who's very young and very poor and ah, they, they do it. With ah, with seven sons, the kings we have, have seven son. And the old son go to do it, and the other people do it. But the cake, the people, the person who's not a son do it, and be Oh, Wow! It's good! and something. So I, [laugh] I don't know, I just read a book, you know.

B: Yeah. Did you, did you hear many stories like, like that when you were young?

H: Yeah.

B: People tell stories?

H: Yes.

B: How nice. The important part of folklore in many places, you know, telling stories.

H: That's the, that's the ah, the history in my, in my country. (B: umhm) So everybody went, went to, went to high school, they had to know that. This is not in high school, it's in pri, primary school.

B: Yes, younger.

H: Younger.

B: Did your parents tell you stories when you were young? Your mother and father tell you stories?

H: No.

B: Your grand, do you have, do you remember your grandmother and grandfathers?

H: Yeah.

B: Did you?

H: Yeah.

B: Did they tell you stories?

H: Yeah, and they, they tell me the story, but the school still tell me the story. (B: Umhm)
More stories in school.

B: What kinds of stories did you learn from, from family? What kind did you learn from your family?

H: Ah

B: We have a kind of story we call a fairy tale. I don't, do you know weather it's the fairy tales?

H: Fairy tale?

B: Right, for children. Children are told stories here about (--)

H: Do you mean a switch and they, that you are (--)

B: When fantastic things happen. You kill giants and the hero has to, the hero has to do great things.

H: Oh, I see.

B: You know?

H: No, I don't know that story.

B: You don't have stories like that?

H: No. I really don't know much, many story about my country. I know it when I was young. So far I forgot all [laugh]. Because I live in American. I don't have the people remind me to remember that, you know?

B: Right. Right. So when you get married and you have children, what are, what will you teach? What will you teach your children?

H: Oh, I just try to teach, if I have a children I just try to teach them to keep my culture and keep

my language.

B: You would teach them Vietnamese?

H: Yes.

B: You want them to speak Vietnamese?

H: Vietnamese and keep some, some old custom. I don't need to keep that. I mean ah, some ah, just keep the custom. (B: Which ones?) But you keep some, what's, what's the good? I mean (--
)

B: Which, which ones?

H: Ah, which one? I don't, I don't know which one. But it's like (--)

B: Respect?

H: The old, old custom in my country the parents pick out for them to uh, to get married you know. When you get married the parents have right to pick out, have the right to choose for son or daughter. That's a very old custom.

B: You won't do that?

H: No. [Chuckles] [Ahn coughs] Excuse me.

B: Do you think your children will want to be all-American?

H: [Chuckles] Well, I don't know about that. I just try to keep them to know they are Vietnamese, you know. They are Vietnamese. They are not American.

B: But they will be. They will be U.S. citizens.

H: [Laugh] Yeah I know.

B: They were born here. And they'll probably want to grow up to be Americans. Don't you think? [Ahn doesn't respond and there is a long pause.] Do you know ah, Vietnamese people living here in America who, who have young children who are growing up?

H: Yeah.

B: Are they, are they learning about being Vietnamese [unclear]?

H: Yes. Most, most parents in here, they try to keep their children to be Vietnamese, and talk, speak Vietnamese at home, and learn how to write, you know.

B: And to read.

H: But ah, it's like my sister when she come here. She know how to write, how to write in Vietnamese language, you know, something. And then a few, a few months, a few first months she just came here, she write a letter to ah, to my parents sometime. And then later on she forgot, she forgot. So I ask her, "you write a letter to ah, to parents?" She write a letter, but sometime she put English word in there. Sometime she write Vietnamese word, and English, and Vietnamese, English. [Chuckles] So even when I read that I don't understand what it, what it say. So, I mean my parents never understand when they see it drawn like that.

B: They won't read English. They don't [unclear].

H: No, no. That's why I had the trouble. And maybe a few years later she write all English, no Vietnamese. [Laughs]

B: Do you have books at home?

H: Yeah.

B: In Vietnamese?

H: Yeah. So I, I stay with um, give her idea to read the book, you know. I advise her to, to read the Vietnamese book, and to write Vietnamese.

B: It takes practice.

H: Yeah.

B: Or you forget.

H: Yeah. I just try to keep my sister to be a Vietnamese, and I mean, know how to write, (B: Umhm) how to read. (B: Right) But, I have no time, you know. The trouble is no time.

B: Are there other Vietnamese ah, boys and girls in the school she goes too, St. Patrick's?

H: Yeah, a lot of Vietnamese go to St. Patrick's, because uh, that's a good school. Because I mean good school, because they got more attention, you know, from the teacher.

B: Right.

H: A small school.

B: Is there something, anything I missed that you would like to, to say?

H: [Chuckles]

B: Something I didn't ask that you think is important?

H: No. (B: No?) I don't know. [Chuckles] You know, this is the first time I talk with someone about my country like this.

B: Really? It's been very interesting.

H: I say I talk to ah, I say I talk to my people, because they are Vietnamese. So they know that.
(B: Yes, right) Yes, we talk sometimes.

B: Right. Are there special problems that you think your people have in adjusting to America?

H: No. [Laughs]

B: Just like language?

H: Yeah. I mean the, the big problem is the language and the culture, that's all. Just the language and the, maybe some Vietnamese when you know, some, sometime I go out, I uh, I met some Vietnamese. They talk to me after I ask them with the Vietnamese language, they answer me English.

B: Oh.

H: Because they understand, but they can't talk.

B: Oh, I see. So you have to keep practicing.

H: Yeah.

B: Any language is that way.

H: [Chuckles]

TAPE COMES TO AN END